

Frans Hals

c. 1582/1583–1666

SON OF FRANCHOYS HALS, a cloth worker from Mechelen, and Adriana van Geertenryck of Antwerp, Frans Hals was probably born in Antwerp in about 1582 or 1583. Sometime after the fall of Antwerp to the Spanish in August 1585, his parents moved the family to the northern Netherlands. Frans' brother, Dirck, was baptized in Haarlem in 1591. Dirck Hals (1591–1656) also became a painter; apparently so did a third brother, Joost (died before 16 October 1626), none of whose works have been identified.

In the posthumous second edition of Karel van Mander's *Het Schilder-boeck* (1618), it is stated that Frans Hals had studied painting with the author (1548–1606); if so, his apprenticeship was probably before 1603, when Van Mander left Haarlem for a country estate outside the city to finish writing his book. This alleged apprenticeship, however, did not appear to have much effect on Hals, whose style bears no obvious resemblance to that of Van Mander, and who rarely depicted the type of subjects that *Het Schilder-boeck* urged young artists to choose. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that extremely little is known of Hals' activities prior to his late twenties, and it is conceivable that as-yet unearthed or unidentified juvenilia will necessitate a reappraisal of his early career.

Hals is first documented as an artist in 1610, when he entered the Haarlem guild. In June 1615, the artist's wife, Annetje Harmansdr., died, leaving him with two young children, one of whom, Harmen (1611–1669), became a painter. The next year Hals made his only recorded trip outside Holland, traveling to Antwerp, where he stayed from August until November. Then, in 1617, he remarried. His second wife, Lysbeth Reynier, was reprimanded by the city authorities on several occasions for brawling. She bore the artist at least eight children—one baptized nine days after the wedding—amongst them the artists Frans the Younger (1618–1669), Reynier (1627–1671), and Nicolaes (1628–1686). Another artist son named Jan or Johannes (active c. 1635–1650) was also probably a child of this marriage, and a daughter, Adriaentje, married the Haarlem genre and still-life painter Pieter Gerritsz. van Roestraten (1627–1698), bringing the total number of artists in

the family to about a dozen, if one includes Hals' brothers and nephews.

Although portraiture was always Hals' specialty, he also painted genre scenes and a handful of religious paintings. In his early maturity, from 1616 to 1625, he was associated with a Haarlem *rederijkerskamer* (rhetoricians' chamber), *De Wijngaertrancken*. The appreciation of his painting skills, to which a number of important group portrait commissions testify, was documented as early as 1628, when Samuel Ampzing's general description of the city of Haarlem included a passage praising Hals' ability to capture the spirit of his portrait sitters. Despite this recognition, Hals was continually plagued by financial difficulties. Even during the 1630s, when his services as a portraitist seem to have been in the greatest demand, he is known to have been sued by his butcher, baker, and shoemaker in pursuit of unpaid debts. In 1654, he paid a debt to a baker by surrendering his household goods and several paintings, and from 1662 until his death he received relief from the burgomasters—an initial gift of 50 guilders, plus an annual allowance of 150 guilders per year, increased to 200 guilders in 1663.

Hals died in Haarlem on 29 August 1666, and was buried in Saint Bavo on 1 September. His only documented pupils are his son-in-law Pieter Gerritsz. van Roestraeten and Vincent Laurensz. van der Vinne (1628–1702). Houbraken states that Adriaen Brouwer (1606–1638), Dirck van Delen (1605–1675), Philips Wouwerman (1618–1668), Adriaen van Ostade (q.v.), and Hals' sons also trained in his studio. His style also had an impact on his brother Dirck, as well as Judith Leyster (q.v.) and her husband, Jan Miense Molenaer (c. 1610–1668). Despite his artistic success during his lifetime, Hals was almost totally forgotten after his death. It was not until the 1860s and the rise of realism and then impressionism in the nineteenth century that the vigorous and free brushwork that brought his portraits of Dutch burghers vividly to life was once again appreciated by critics, collectors, and contemporary artists.

Bibliography

- Van Mander 1618: fol. 130.
Ampzing 1628: 371.
Schrevelius 1648: 289.
Houbraken 1753, 1: 90–95.
Bode 1871.
HdG 1907–1927, 3 (1910): 1–139.
Valentiner 1921a.
Haarlem 1962.
Slive 1970–1974.
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Jowell 1974.
Baard 1981.
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A Young Man in a Large Hat

1626/1629

Oil on oak, 29.3 x 23.2 (11⁹/₁₆ x 9¹/₈)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Technical Notes: The original support is a single oak panel with a vertical grain set into a 0.5 cm wide collar of oak that does not appear to be original. Dendrochronology dates the panel to an earliest felling date of 1625, with an estimated date for use of 1629.¹ Both panel and protective collar are beveled along all four edges on the back. A check at the top right corner is the only damage to the support. The ground is a thick white layer that leaves the grain pattern visible and extends to the edge of the original panel in all areas save the lower right corner.

Paint is applied thinly in quick fluid strokes with rounded ends. Highlights are applied thickly, worked wet on wet into the thin underlayers. The sketchy nature of the painting is enhanced by some intentional rubbing in of thin paint layers. The painting is in excellent condition, with scattered small losses discretely inpainted. An aged but only slightly discolored varnish layer is present. No major conservation treatment has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: C. J. Bredius, Woerden by 1918.² (M. Knoedler & Co., New York and Paris); sold 30 January 1929 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 June 1937 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: Washington 1989b, 244, no. 39, color repro.

THE IDENTITY of the impish young man who turns in his chair and smilingly gazes out at the viewer in this oil sketch is not known. Whether Hals' perceptive characterization was exclusively due to his artistic genius or was aided by a personal relationship to

the sitter may never be determined; nonetheless, it should be noted that Hals' son Harmen (1611–1669) would have been in his middle to late teens when this sketch was painted, 1626/1629.⁴ This age seems probable for the sitter, particularly given his fashionable wardrobe and sporty mustache.

That the painting depicts a specific individual can be argued not solely on the basis of the characterization but also because of the oval illusionistic frame that surrounds the figure. Hals frequently included such painted framing devices on small-scale portraits in the 1610s and 1620s. An identical painted frame, for example, acts as a foil for the sitter's expressive gesture in Hals' *Portrait of a Man*, 1627 (fig. 1). Although the dramatic effect of the man's gesture as he reaches through the picture plane is not as pronounced in the Washington painting, the young man's elbow does extend slightly beyond the painted frame. More important compositionally for Hals was the use of the oval frame in this painting to reinforce the dynamic spatial character of the pose.

A number of Hals' small-scale portraits were en-

Fig. 1. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, 1627, oil on copper, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie

